

Sarawak honours governor's killers

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KUALA LUMPUR: Four Malaysians who murdered a British colonial governor have been honoured as heroes 46 years after they were hanged in a prison at Kuching, capital of the Borneo state of Sarawak.

In contrast with neighbouring Indonesia, where people of the former Netherlands East Indies fought a fierce guerilla war to secure their freedom from the Dutch, Malaysia's struggle against the British was mainly bloodless and its transition to independence peaceful.

But there has been a growing move to identify 'freedom fighters' among Malaysians who were branded murderers or assassins by the colonial authorities.

The men now reclassified as patriots were sentenced to death for killing Sir Duncan Stewart, the Governor of Sarawak, on December 3, 1949, when he was on an official visit to the Sarawak town of Sibü. They were hanged three months later.

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On the 46th anniversary of their execution, the remains of Rosli Dhoby, who fatally stabbed Stewart, and his accomplices Morshidi Sidek, Awang Ramli and Bujang Suntong, were removed from their graves in the Central Prison at Kuching, placed in coffins draped in the Sarawak state colours and flown to Sibü, their birthplace.

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A large crowd, including government officials and relatives of the men, gathered at a local mosque to witness their burial with full state honours.

Speaking at the ceremony, Sarawak's Social Development Minister, Adenan Satem, said they had sacrificed their lives 'to fight for our independence'. He said a mausoleum would be built at the grave and a book written about their struggle.

The mausoleum will be a modest memorial compared with the Pasir Salak complex in Perak State, commemorating the three men involved in the assassination of British resident James Birch in 1875.

The attractions of the complex include a three-metre high model of a Bugis sundang, a type of sword similar to the Malay keris, which was the weapon used to attack Birch.

Pasir Salak, which is about 70 kilometres southwest of Ipoh, has been designated 'the cradle of the anti-colonial movement'.

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